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TAGS: PREL PARM IZ CA UNSC

SUBJECT: CANADIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CALLS SECRETARY POWELL'S IRAQ PRESENTATION "DISTURBING AND PERSUASIVE"

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stephen Kelly,  
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (SBU) Foreign Minister Bill Graham told the Canadian press that Secretary Powell's February 5 presentation on Iraq "amounts to a transfer of the burden of proof from the United States to Saddam Hussein." Graham went on to say that "we are not at a point where there is a need to use force. However, we don't have much time left. If Dr. Blix comes back and says that there is no chance that Saddam Hussein is going to cooperate with us, the call for more time, I don't think, will be very convincing." The Secretary's speech also drew favorable comment in the Canadian press, with most commentators saying that the presentation made clear that Iraq was concealing weapons of mass destruction from the inspectors.

¶12. (SBU) While Prime Minister Chretien spent the day striking a health care deal with provincial leaders, Graham fielded opposition questions in the House of Commons after the Secretary's speech to the UNSC. While the official

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opposition Canadian Alliance Party criticized the government for not lining up more strongly with the U.S. and the UK, other opposition parties (Bloc Quebecois, New Democratic Party) called for Canada to oppose any military action against Iraq not specifically endorsed by a new UNSC resolution.

¶13. (C) All opposition parties, including the Progressive Conservatives, called for a Commons debate and vote on Canada's position toward conflict with Iraq. Ron Hoffman, Foreign Affairs' Director for Defense and Security Relations, told us that there is no obligation or tradition in Canada for the Government to allow such a vote, and that the ruling Liberal Party caucus is too divided on this issue to risk it in any case. Hoffman said that the Secretary's presentation will help the GoC make its case with the Canadian public, which is just as divided as Parliament.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: The Secretary's speech did not change the minds of our critics on the Canadian political left, but it has helped us where it matters most, within Cabinet. The evidence that Iraq is concealing WMD from the inspectors will help the GoC make the case that Iraq is in breach of UNSCR 1441, and that there is justification for "serious consequences" even if a second resolution is not obtained. Graham continues to emphasize the UN process, but he has distanced himself from the French and German position on inspections for inspections' sake. The GoC will not make any dramatic moves prior to the inspectors' February 14 report, but it realizes that time is quickly running out and is positioning itself domestically to support action against Iraq.

KELLY